

State Representative **HELEN SOMMERS**

2006 Report to the 36th District



NEW PRIMARY ELECTION DAY

Washington's primary elections in September are the latest in the country. Some states hold primaries as early as March. Next year, our primary will be moved back from September to the third Tuesday in August. Close elections, recounts, and slow absentee ballot returns have been a major concern to election officials facing weeks of lead time for preparing the November ballot. This change provides a more realistic time to assure proper and accurate ballot counts.



FISCAL PRUDENCE

A stronger economy brought the state a welcome higher revenue level. This increase funded investments in K-12 and higher education, as well as important additions in health care for children, housing for low-income families and senior care. Facing potentially higher demands in health and pension costs next biennium, we set up "savings accounts" totaling \$940 million, carrying forward the funds we anticipate needing next year.



SPECIAL ITEMS OF INTEREST

The legislative approved funding for several Seattle projects:

- Seattle Aquarium improvements
- Pike Place Market Health Center
- Daybreak Star Cultural Center
- Pacific Science Center's Dead Sea Scroll exhibit

State Representative **Helen Sommers**

EARLY LEARNING - BORN TO LEARN

Researchers at the University of Washington describe the infant brain as an outstanding learning machine. Very early stimulus is critical to later achievement. Leaders at the National Reading Foundation (based here in our state) have impressed us with their practice of taking books and information to the parents of newborns and their training classes for parents of all income levels about ways to stimulate learning in the very young.

The Governor proposed and the Legislature approved a new agency, the Dept. of Early Learning. Along with existing programs such as Head Start, the department will be responsible for stronger outreach to new parents. State funding is provided as match for potential grants from foundations to greatly expand the efforts to reach, and teach, all parents with young children.

The UW advises that an infant recognizes the sounds of all the world's languages, but by one year of age loses all except the sounds he or she hears frequently. In many countries a child grows up with two, three or even more languages. We need more language skills.

READING, WRITING AND MATH TESTS - FUNDING FOR ACHIEVEMENT

High School students have been taking the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) in March and April. These tests are the result of a major policy decision to increase the achievement level in our schools. They are specifically designed to evaluate reasoning and critical thinking, along with basic knowledge.

For the first time, passage will be required for graduation in 2008. 10th graders are taking the tests now and can do retakes if necessary. A major

part of this year's budget is our commitment to help students reach the new achievement levels. For those who do not pass this spring, funding is provided for summer school, extra help after school and on Saturdays, special help with math instruction, and focussed training for teachers.

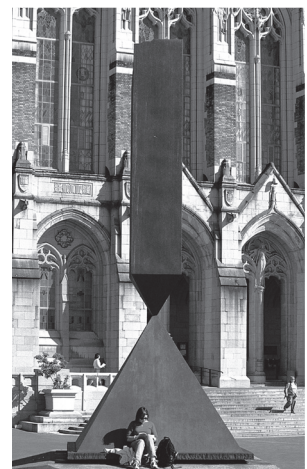
Funding is also provided for a program called Navigation, where the student takes responsibility for developing his or her own high school program and presenting it to parents and teachers.



INVESTMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The supplemental budget funds more opportunities for math, science and engineering degrees, including computer engineering. New enrollments are provided to UW, WSU and the regional universities. New funds for high demand courses are also provided to the community college system. Our high tech and health care sectors stress the need for these critical investments, preparing our own residents for these high paying job opportunities.

Funding was provided for the UW's new building for nanotechnology research. Nanotechnology: the science of building circuits and devices from single atoms and molecules.



2006 SESSION REPORT



THE VIADUCT - EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE PLUS FIVE YEARS

It is five years since an earthquake put the Alaskan Way Viaduct at risk. The issue—where to put more than 110,000 vehicles a day. Controversy continues over whether to replace the elevated structure with a rebuild or put a whole new roadway underground. The Legislature approved the funding for a rebuild last year during the 2005 session. The mayor of Seattle wants the replacement structure in a tunnel. The City Council appears split between a rebuild, a tunnel and a surface option. The surface option cannot handle the 110,000 vehicles, so is not a viable choice.

The total project costs are estimated to be:

Core Rebuild	Tunnel	Core Tunnel
\$2.0 - 2.4 billion	\$3.4 - 4.1 billion	\$3.0 - 3.6 billion

(The full tunnel includes more costs for the seawall and Battery Street tunnel.)

The funds for the rebuild are available now. Additional funding required for the tunnel (more than \$1 billion) will be Seattle's responsibility. Utility taxes and transportation funds are possibilities—or the Mayor's proposal of an increase in property taxes for transportation.

WASHINGTON MOVES TO JOIN BIOFUELS INDUSTRY

Washington joins other states to reduce dependence on foreign oil and to initiate an infant biofuels industry. By January 2009, Washington must replace 2% of its diesel and gasoline supplies with biofuel—biodiesel and ethanol. Biodiesel can be made from crops such as soy beans and canola, and ethanol can be made from wheat and corn. This percentage increases over time, but can be suspended by the Governor if found unrealistic.

A second major goal is to strengthen our agricultural industry by providing growing markets for these crops. The proposal includes state funds for crushers to prepare the products for conversion, reducing these capital costs to farmers.

Biofuel production is economically sound when gasoline and diesel costs are high, but will become relatively expensive if oil prices return to former lower levels. The legislation was supported by such unlikely partners as the environmental community, the Farm Bureau and the State Labor Council.



State Representative **Helen Sommers**

BIG SESSION FOR ENVIRONMENT

A spokesman for the environmental community called this a “stellar” session. Over \$40 million was authorized for clean-up in Puget Sound and the long, narrow, deep Hood Canal (actually a fjord not a canal). There will be more inspection of oil-related vessels and loans to homeowners to fix failing septic systems. Water storage on the Columbia will be enhanced, improving stream flows for fish at critical times.

A new law requires manufacturers of TV and computers to provide for electronics-waste recycling. Another makes Washington the first to place a ban on phosphates in dish-washing detergent.



Please join me, Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson, and Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles at a Town Hall Meeting on April 29, 2006 from 10:00 a.m. to noon at Antioch University, 2326 6th Ave. Room 100.



Committees:
Appropriations, *Chair*
Higher Education
State Investment Board
Wash. State Institute for
Public Policy, Board
Pension Funding Council

Representative
Helen Sommers
PO BOX 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
Phone: 360-786-7814



PRESORTED
STANDARD
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing